

Dragonshards

Heroic Journeys

By Keith Baker



The thin man pulled back his left sleeve. The mark of Passage was spread across his forearm, a complex pattern that seemed to be painted with blue light. For a moment it burned with a deeper light, and a haze of heat surrounded the mark. Then a vibration rumbled through the ground. Seconds later, a bizarre contrivance rose out of the earth. Roughly the size and shape of a small stagecoach, it was crusted with quartz, volcanic glass, and semiprecious stones. It had wheels, yet both the wheels and the base of the carriage were merged with the ground.

"Well, go on, get in," the man said, opening the door to the rear compartment. "We need to be off if we're to reach Marguul Pass by nightfall."

Eberron is a world of pulp adventure. One of the common themes of the pulps is travel. In a long-forgotten Lizardfolk temple in the jungles of Q'barra, a cryptic inscription leads an explorer across the ocean to the unknown wilds of Xen'drik and then down to a sunken city in the depths of Shargon's Teeth. But what's involved in travel?

Riding the Red Line

While travel is a staple of pulp adventure, it is rarely a significant part of a story. In the Indiana Jones movies, travel across the world is represented with only a few seconds of screen time, as a red line swiftly connects the hero's starting point to his destination. If an adventure begins in Valenar and the next crucial piece occurs in the Shadow Marches, it would be fairly dull to spend six game sessions covering the trip: what's important to the story is what happens at the end of the journey.

In this case, a little description can go a long way. "In Taer Vaelestras, you bargain with a Lhazaarite air privateer who agrees to fly you to Varna. There, the local Wayfinders supply you with magebred steeds and you speed down the great road, exchanging horses at Delethorn and Erlaskar. Eventually you find yourself in the town of Sylbaran, poised on the very edge of the Shadow Marches." There's no need for trouble on the road; the focus of the adventure is on the evil that waits in the Shadow Marches. People travel between Varna and Sylbaran every day -- that doesn't need to be part of the adventure.

It's All About the Journey

In *The Three Musketeers*, the quest to regain the diamond studs is a series of ambushes and traveling encounters. Much of *The Fellowship of the Rings* is one big journey. If the party is racing against the Emerald Claw to claim the Orb of Dol Azur, an occasional ambush or scheme involving agents of the Emerald Claw helps to set the tone of the story. Even if there is no clear enemy to face, many scenarios that can make travel interesting and entertaining if the DM isn't in a hurry. Is the party traveling on a lightning rail? Perhaps a band of rogue Oriens teleport aboard and hijack the caravan. An airship could come under attack by harpies, rocs, or bandits on hippogriffs, or it might crash land in the middle of the Mournland. Traveling overland, an encounter with hobgoblins in Darguun, zealous Thrane customs officials, a Karnathi undead patrol, or Talenta raiders on

dinosaurs can help to establish the unique flavor of the different regions of Eberron. It's all a matter of balance. If the adventure were a movie, would travel occur in the blink of an eye, or would you be willing to sacrifice a fifth of your running time to the voyage?

Keeping Track of Time

Whether the DM uses the red line or the extended journey, a critical question is whether he keeps track of time. Eberron is a large world; by the maps, it can take an Orien caravan 100 days to cross from one end of Breland to the other. Eberron is also a world of cinematic action and adventure, so realism is optional. If the DM doesn't want to deal with the passage of significant amounts of time during the course of the adventure, he has a few options. The first is to look at the additional modes of transportation listed below. If the party has a patron prepared to provide them with tickets on the Orien express, speed is not a concern. The second is to simply ignore time. In *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, how long does it take Indiana Jones to get to Tibet? No one knows. It's not relevant to the story, and there's no need to worry about it. All that matters is that eventually he gets there and the story begins again.

If the DM wants a more realistic game, he probably wants to consider how the passage of time affects the rest of the world. If the party leaves Sharn and comes back after a round trip of 200 days, things may have shifted in their absence. The balance of power in the criminal underworld might have changed. An ally of the party might have been murdered, providing fuel for a future investigation. Political tensions may have flared up: a border skirmish between Thrane and Karrnath might threaten to start the Last War anew. This can also explain how the Lord of Blades can be back with a new scheme when the party defeated him only two real weeks ago: on Eberron, it's been half a year, and the Lord of Blades has had plenty of time to plan his revenge! Each approach has advantages. The final choice is up to the DM.

Airships, Lightning Rails, and... Horses.

Eberron offers a few basic modes of travel.

- Characters can travel on foot or horseback, just as in any other setting. This follows the standard rules for travel as described on page 164 of the *Player's Handbook*. Add +1 miles/hour to the unencumbered overland speed of a magebred horse, allowing a magebred light horse to travel 56 miles in a day. A Valenar riding horse has a base overland speed of 8 miles/hour and can travel 64 miles in a day.
- Sea travel follows the overland rules, but most vessels are built from soarwood and travel at twice the standard speed. In addition, the elemental galleons of House Lyrandar can travel at speeds of up to 20 miles/hour -- 480 miles/day -- at only twice the standard cost for sea travel. When going from Sharn to any port, the elemental galleon provides the best balance of speed to gold.
- The lightning rail travels at a rate of 30 miles/hour and can travel straight through the night, up to 720 miles/day. However, it too has its limitations. It only connects major cities, and the war destroyed many rail lines -- notably the path through the Mournland. In addition, Orien charges a high price for independent passengers.
- Airships are the latest form of transportation. The typical airship travels 20 miles/hour and can cover 480 miles in a day. Airships require special docks, and there are relatively few in the Lyrandar fleet. As a result, airship travel is very expensive and only connects major cities.



Low-level groups are not going to have the gold to afford the faster forms of travel. The Wayfinder Foundation, Library of Korranberg, and similar groups have special arrangements with Lyrandar and Orien. If the party is working for such an organization, the boss will pick up travel expenses. This can even be a form of treasure: a carte blanche providing one month of free use of the services of House Orien. Beyond that, adventurers can always try to stow away or engage the services of air privateers or rogue artificers who have constructed "lightning jumpers," small vehicles that make use of the lightning rail. Without a true heir of the house at the reins, such vessels can be quite unreliable!

When You Absolutely, Positively Must Get There ...

Travel in Eberron will be explored in greater detail in future products. If a story requires speed above all else, the DM could use any of the following ideas.

- *Horseshoes of speed* increase a horse's base overland speed by 3 miles/hour (24 miles/day). There are rumors that House Orien has developed a dragonshard focus item that doubles the speed of a horse, provided an heir of the mark is within 30 feet. It's said that the Valenar elves also have spells and magic items that further enhance the speed and endurance of a horse.
- If money is truly no object, an heir of the Greater Mark of Passage can teleport you in the blink of an eye. Of course, as a rule this service can only be found in the largest cities of Khorvaire.
- Some say that House Orien has developed a small, fast vehicle that uses the lightning rail system and is just as safe as the standard rail. Similar in size to a stagecoach, these *Orien Express* cars travel at

speeds up to 60 miles/hour, or 1,440 miles/day. There are also rumors about vehicles using bound earth elementals which can travel without the need for rails. However, both of these are theoretical and available for use only at the DM's discretion -- most likely, only when working for a patron with a considerable amount of pull, or for Orien itself.

- Similarly, rumors say that House Lyrandar and the Zil shipwrights have produced a small, experimental airship capable of traveling 50 miles/hour and landing without a full dock.

Ultimately, travel should add to the game experience, not detract from it. The DM needs to decide when to track travel and when it's best to let it slip by in the scene break.

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of **Dungeons & Dragons** since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the world of Eberron to the WotC Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the *Eberron* Campaign Setting and *Shadows of the Last War*, he has worked for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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